

Senator Harkin: A Leader in the Fight Against Prejudice and Discrimination

“As a child, I witnessed the prejudice and discrimination my brother suffered on a daily basis and I pledged that, if I ever gained a position of power, I would fight against that injustice. A key milestone in that fight came in 1990, with the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, truly an emancipation proclamation for nearly 70 million Americans with disabilities. I also take pride, more recently, in leading the fight to enact the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, as well as to obtain Senate passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, all critical civil rights laws.” — Senator Tom Harkin

Throughout his career, Senator Tom Harkin has been committed to the advancement of civil rights. A tireless advocate for people with disabilities, Harkin authored the landmark *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA), legislation which has been lauded as the “Emancipation Proclamation” for people with disabilities. Harkin’s work has resulted in a more inclusive society not just for people with disabilities, but for all Americans. He has fought for a discrimination-free workplace, where people are judged on their talent, ability, and qualifications, not by their religion, color of their skin, gender, national origin, age, whether they have a disability, their sexual orientation, or gender identity. He has worked to protect all Americans from hate crimes and has sought to improve the fairness of our justice system by promoting the confirmation of federal judges that reflect the diversity of America. Harkin’s work has resulted in policies that safeguard and celebrate the diverse character of our nation. **Highlights of Harkin’s work to advance civil rights include:**

Leading the Fight for Disability Rights in Congress:

- Harkin is the Senate author of the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* (ADA). Together with the *ADA Amendments Act of 2008*, this legislation removed barriers in employment, transportation, public services, telecommunications, and public accommodations, and required services such as education and job training to be accessible for all Americans.
- Harkin is largely responsible for creating the guiding principles of disability civil rights legislation: equal opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.
- In the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, Harkin ensured that all states provide special education services not just to school age children but to provide these critical services to younger children three to five.
- To ensure that election polls are accessible to all Americans, Harkin worked to require accessible, independent voting equipment in each polling place and providing incentives for states to make polling places more accessible to voters with disabilities in the *Help America Vote Act of 2002*.

Working to End Discrimination in the Workplace:

- Harkin is a champion of equal pay and stronger remedies for gender inequality in the workplace. He is the author of the *Fair Pay Act*, which he has introduced in every congress since 1996 to combat the gender wage gap.
- Harkin helped pass the *Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009*, a law that reversed a Supreme Court ruling that lower pay based on gender cannot be contested, even if the worker does not learn of it until long after the practice began.
- Harkin has been a leader on age discrimination and has worked with Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Pat Leahy (D-VT) on the [*Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act*](#) to overturn the Supreme Court’s decision in *Gross v. FBL Financial Services, Inc.*, which made it nearly impossible for older workers to prove they had been discriminated against on the basis of age.
- As Chairman of the Senate HELP Committee, Harkin led the charge in Congress to protect LGBT Americans from discrimination in the workplace. Under his leadership in 2013, the Senate passed the [*Employment Non-Discrimination Act*](#) for the first time in history.

Protecting Americans from Hate Crimes:

- Harkin was an original co-sponsor of the *Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009*, which provided broader federal authority to prosecute crimes motivated by race, skin color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

Improving our Justice System:

- Harkin has also worked with President Barack Obama to bring more diversity to the federal bench. In 2012, he recommended Jane Kelly, a former federal defender in the Northern District of Iowa be confirmed to the Eighth Circuit Court. President Obama nominated Kelly for the position in January 2013, and following Senate confirmation in March 2013, Kelly became the second woman in Iowa's history to serve on that court.
- Harkin has a long history of collaborating with Senator Grassley to nominate qualified Iowans for federal judicial positions, including the 2012 confirmation of Stephanie Rose, the first female District Court Judge in the Southern District of Iowa.
- Harkin has fought to ensure that low-income Americans have access to quality, civil representation through programs funded by Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Because of his advocacy, legal aid organizations were able to help approximately 40,000 low-income Iowans with a range of legal issues, including adoptions, evictions, and immigration matters in 2013.

For more information, please visit Senator Harkin's website at <http://harkin.senate.gov/>, or follow him on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/tomharkin> or Twitter <https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin>.